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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 001105

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/BCLTV, INR/B  
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SUBJECT: THAILAND: AMBASSADOR CALLS ON ROYAL THAI SUPREME  
COMMANDER CHAISIT

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (d)

#### SUMMARY

1. (C) On February 8, the Ambassador met with Royal Thai Armed Forces Supreme Commander General Chaisit Shinawatra to discuss a variety of security issues. Chaisit was grateful for U.S. assistance to help Thailand mitigate the impact of the tsunami and correctly noted that our use of Utapao as a regional hub was due to years of U.S.-Thai cooperation. He explained that his Government hopes to use military to military ties with Rangoon to improve Thai-Burmese relations since it is especially difficult for Thai civilian leaders to develop relationships with Burmese military counterparts. Chaisit several times suggested that change in Burma will be a slow, step by step, process. He was critical of some aspects of the RTG's policies to curb unrest in the south. For instance, he suggested that it would be wiser to place Thai soldiers along the Thai-Malaysian border rather than have them billeted in urban centers. General Chaisit was convinced that foreign influences and lack of economic opportunity combine to encourage Muslim youth in the south to explore separatist causes. When the Ambassador asked about the possibility of Thai troops returning to Iraq, Chaisit was caught unaware that Thailand had recently agreed to dispatch peacekeepers to Burundi, but his staff noted the importance of working with UN forces. Chaisit's staff wanted increased U.S. assistance to combat narcotics and to build a National Training Facility to improve their unconventional warfare tactics. When they asked us to increase our IMET funding, the Ambassador noted that Thailand could increase its quota of students by co-paying transportation and per diem costs. End Summary.

#### TSUNAMI ASSISTANCE

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2. (C) Chaisit began the meeting by mentioning he had just visited Utapao naval air station and had met with CSF-536 commander LtGen Blackman. He again expressed his Government's gratitude for U.S. assistance after the December 26 tsunami. Noting the importance of using Utapao as a regional relief hub, Chaisit said our bilateral cooperation was only possible due to decades of working together.

#### COBRA GOLD

3. (C) Saying he was glad that Cobra Gold 2005 would still take place, Chaisit explained the importance of U.S.-funded Exercise Related Construction (ERC) projects. LTG Kemarat Kanchanawat, Chaisit's J-3, said that ERC projects are generally planned out five years in advance and that, even though this year's Cobra Gold will take place in the northern part of Thailand, Supreme Command supports doing some ERC projects in the south to help mitigate the impact of the tsunami.

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#### BURMA

4. (C) The Ambassador asked about Chaisit's recent visit to Burma. Chaisit is convinced that the best way to reduce much of the cross-border tension is to build up the legitimate cross-border economic trade. He also cited the large number of displaced persons without a national identity in Burma as the cause of many border problems. Chaisit discussed the difficulty his Government has working with Rangoon's SPDC ruling junta, citing that each of the 17 members has his own agenda and own power base. Due to the military structure of Burma's government, he explained, the RTG's engagement strategy with Burma is to use military to military links to help the Thai Foreign Ministry effectively engage with Burmese counterparts. Even then, Chaisit emphasized, it remains difficult to understand with confidence who is best to work with on any given problem. Chaisit also focused on the difficulty of governing a country as diverse as Burma. He seemed convinced that Burmese ethnic factionalism and the lack of a common national identity make the SPDC's job even more difficult. Although he believed that Aung San Suu Kyi

would eventually be released from captivity, Chaisit said that the resolution of her case, as well as the pace of reform generally in Burma, will be a slow, step by step process.

#### SOUTHERN THAILAND

15. (C) Turning to the separatist problems in southern Thailand, Chaisit again emphasized the need for economic development and better education. He explained that the lack of legitimate jobs in the region force many to work on the gray or black market. He was surprisingly frank and critical of two political decisions in the south. First, he said that he strongly disagreed with the decision made three years ago to remove Thai troops from the region. During that period when troops were not present, he observed, separatists used the opportunity to become stronger and to enhance links with outside groups. Second, Chaisit was very critical of the Royal Thai Army's decision to billet troops in urban areas. While quick to point out that overall responsibilities for tactics in the south belong to the Royal Thai Army, not Supreme Command, General Chaisit told me that if the decision were his, he would move all of his troops to the Thai-Malaysian border, sealing that border, and only have undercover operatives working in the cities. He confirmed previous DAO reporting that a new Infantry Division, the 15th, would be set up to work in the south.

16. (C) Repeating a theme Thai leaders have mentioned frequently lately, Chaisit seemed convinced that foreign influence among Muslim youth in the south is growing. The lack of educational opportunities coupled with high unemployment make them ripe targets for recruitment by separatist organizations, he noted. He mentioned how many Muslim boys could not speak Thai effectively and were lured to Pakistan and other countries to receive instruction at Koranic schools.

#### ANOTHER PKO OPPORTUNITY

17. (C) The Ambassador noted the RTG's recent decision to send peacekeepers to Burundi and asked whether we could expect a return of Thai troops to Iraq. Chaisit was caught unaware of the Burundi PKO mission, his staff was up to speed and quickly mentioned the importance of coordinating such work through the United Nations.

#### INCREASED U.S. ASSISTANCE

18. (C) As expected, Chaisit and his staff had a number of suggestions for how the United States could improve our military cooperation. General Kemarat noted the importance of jointly developing a National Training Facility that could help the Thai and U.S. improve capabilities in counter narcotics, counter terrorism, and urban warfare. LTG Chayasit Linthong, Supreme Command J2, said that he had read recently that Secretary Rice had promised increased assistance to U.S. allies in the War on Terror. If this is true, J2 Chayasit said, Thailand would like to know whether funds would be available for Thailand. Supreme Commander Chaisit repeated earlier requests for U.S. assistance in acquiring Cobra helicopters. He said these could be used in conjunction with UAVs to strike at militants.

#### IMET

19. (C) The Ambassador used LTG Kemarat's request that we augment our IMET assistance to Thailand to remind GEN Chaisit that Thailand was currently America's fourth largest recipient of IMET funds. The Ambassador suggested that Thailand could increase the number of students training in the U.S. if the RTG would begin copayments to cover transportation and per diem costs, as they had prior to the 1997 economic crisis. Chaisit's staff countered by saying their own training budget to support IMET was shrinking. The Ambassador said he might raise this issue with Prime Minister Thaksin, which the Thai side heartily endorsed.

BOYCE